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INFO RUCNIRA/IRAN COLLECTIVE PRIORITY
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RUEHNO/USMISSION USNATO PRIORITY 5441

S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 03 ANKARA 000183

SIPDIS

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DEPARTMENT FOR U/S JOSEPH AND ISN A/S ROOD

E.O. 12958: DECL: 01/28/2017

TAGS: [PREL](#) [MOPS](#) [PGOV](#) [TU](#) [IR](#)

SUBJECT: STRATEGY FOR ENGAGING TURKEY ON IRAN

REF: A. ANKARA 6519
[1](#)B. ANKARA 6705
[1](#)C. ANKARA 6697
[1](#)D. ANKARA 6581

Classified By: Ambassador Ross Wilson, reasons 1.4 (b/d)

[1](#)1. (S) Summary: We believe that it is time to initiate in-depth consultations with Turkey on the defense and security implications of a resurgent, possibly nuclear-armed and missile-equipped Iran, and we recommend making use of the visit by U/S Joseph and ISN A/S Rood in February to do so. Work over the coming several years to engage Turkey on this will help address potential security vulnerabilities for this country, NATO and the United States. It will also help to focus our military-to-military engagement and move beyond bilateral tensions we can expect in 2007 over Iraq and a possible Armenian genocide resolution in the US Congress. Although this is not an exhaustive list, US engagement with Turkey could focus on:

- Iranian military, nuclear and missile developments;
- political and security threats resulting from such developments;
- proliferation challenges raised by Iran,s actions;
- potential countermeasures (Turkish, U.S.-Turkish, NATO, actions elsewhere in the region); and
- exchanges on homeland security, preparedness, and disaster mitigation.

We informally broached the issue of an organized dialogue along these lines on the margins of the December High-Level Defense Group (HLDG) meetings in Ankara and found both Turkish General Staff D/CHOD GEN Saygun and MFA Deputy U/S Akgunay interested. End Summary

Concerns about Iran's Regional Ambitions

[1](#)2. (S) Turkey is watching military and nuclear developments

in neighboring Iran with alarm. Military planners acknowledge the need to begin taking Iranian efforts more clearly into account as Turkey looks at future defense procurement and security planning. Iranian efforts are at least part of the reason why Turkey has begun exploring the possible acquisition of a missile defense system. Turks are also disturbed by Iran's ideological challenge. They stress that Iran is skillfully using religious fault lines between Sunnis and Shias, and within the Shia community, to sow instability throughout the region and particularly in Saudi Arabia and the Gulf countries; they recall Tehran's attempts in the 1980s and 1990s to export Islamic revolution to Turkey. They expect, correctly, that a mighty Iran will whittle away at Turkey's relative position of strength. While uncertain what exactly this might mean, they don't like it and want to counter it.

13. (S) Many here also fear that the crisis over Iran's nuclear programs may eventually lead to war. Press portrayals here of US saber rattling provoke anxiety in both public and official circles. People worry about the costs to Turkish interests of sanctions, to say nothing of armed conflict, and in this respect they regard Iraq as a bad example. Turkish authorities do not want to be out of sync with us on Iran-related diplomacy, but they also do not want to get out in front. They want and feel the need to be more deeply involved in shaping those issues than they believe was the case regarding Iraq.

14. (S) This gives us an opening to draw Turkey more clearly into evolving thoughts and plans about how we and our friends and allies should begin preparing both for the possibility of

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a nuclear and missile equipped Iran, as well as for the reality of a resurgent, bellicose Iran that is threatening its neighbors. Such a dialogue has a number of advantages for us.

-- First, it can focus Turkish minds more clearly on the Iran problem and what is to be done about it. This should help shore up Ankara's support for our diplomacy on Iran-related issues. It should help guide defense and security planning here, as well.

-- Second, Iran can be a useful focus for on-going policy discussions, per the Shared Vision agreed upon by Secretary Rice and FM Gul last July, and in our military-to-military engagement. We have worked successfully to restore dialogue that was in some respects cut off following the Turkish parliament's March 2003 decision against allowing an invasion of Iraq from the north. We need to go beyond "restoring dialogue" as an end in itself, however. There is no more appropriate target for collaboration than what is clearly going to be one of the premier defense and security challenges of the 21st century.

-- Third, an Iran-centered unifying theme in our relations can help us to manage and then move beyond problems in 2007 in our bilateral relations with Turkey over Iraq and a possible Armenian genocide resolution in the Congress.

Possible Elements of a US-Turkish Dialogue on Iran

15. (S) Share intelligence assessments on and consult about Iranian military, nuclear and missile developments. Turkey has welcomed detailed US assessments at the staff and policy level. Particularly important were the February 2006 consultations led by UNVIE Ambassador Schulte and discussion following a December 2006 HLDG presentation by DIA on Iran's nuclear program and regional strategy. We need to sustain this with frequent briefings and exchanges at many levels in MFA, TGS and intelligence channels.

16. (S) Review the political and defense/security threats that

result from a resurgent Iran. We and Turkey need to develop a common and more specific assessment of the threats Iran poses regionally, as well as the threats presented by the weapon systems Iran is aiming for. Turks have their own intelligence and insights to share. We want to gain from that and perhaps also target Turkey's extensive capabilities in an optimal manner.

¶7. (S) Address the proliferation risk. We already engage the Turkish Foreign Ministry, Customs, and other agencies on a range of export control and non-proliferation projects. Turkey is a participant in all major non-proliferation regimes, supports the Proliferation Security Initiative, will host a Global Initiative to Combat Nuclear Terrorism meeting (an initial Partner) in February, and has just ratified the bilateral Nonproliferation Cooperation Agreement. Finding ways to tie together these and other disparate efforts would help Turkey organize a more coherent and cohesive overall approach to Iran-related proliferation concerns. It could also identify potential gaps and be a means to overcome Turkish sensitivities regarding the Black Sea, Iranian transshipments across Turkish territory (e.g., to Syria), etc.

¶8. (S) Explore potential countermeasures. In order to elicit Turkish buy-in to the steps that we and other partners in the region take to address the Iranian threat, it will be important for Turks to feel they are part of the process of developing those steps. Turkey should hear our ideas on potential countermeasures. These may include actions Turkey can take; US-Turkish collaborative work (e.g., to design a Turkish missile defense capability that can link optimally with US and NATO systems, target intelligence collection, etc.); other NATO-centered work; and regional efforts, especially where Turkey could play a helpful role (e.g., with

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Azerbaijan).

¶9. (S) Exchanges on homeland security. There are many homeland security issues where dialogue and exchanges could be important substantively and also help leverage Turkish engagement on other parts of our Iran-related agenda. The most obvious issue is nuclear accident/incident preparedness given that the possibilities for a substantial nuclear accident or incident in Iran obviously rises as its program further develops. Discussions could include both civilian and military officials and address civil preparedness, consequence management, and defense of the civilian population.

¶10. (S) If Washington concurs, post urges that U/S Joseph and ISN A/S Rood be prepared to raise this during bilateral talks on the margins of the February 12-13 Global Initiative discussions in Ankara.

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WILSON